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Sermon
Rev Howard N Brown?
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And he said unto them, Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.

Luke 12 – 15

"Honesty," says an old Proverb, "is the best policy;" and that is a very wise or a ~~very~~ somewhat foolish saying according as it is construed. The proverb really means, I suppose, that dishonesty is never a good policy; and so taken it states one of the most important truths which the experience of mankind has approved. In all crime there is an element of weakness or folly which though it may not appear for the moment, is sure to prove, in the end, fatal to the schemes constructed upon it; But construed too literally, – taken to

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mean that an honest course followed from politic motives, is the best possible course to adopt, the wisdom of the proverb is rather questionable. In truth. genuine honesty, is not a "policy" at all; that is to say it is an attitude or habit of mind in which self-interested motives are not considered, but only the commands of right and justice. That is not true honesty therefore, ~~which~~ but only an imitation of honesty which seeks by truthful means to serve politic ends. It may be a good, or even the best policy, (if one is to govern his conduct by such considerations,) to simulate an unalterable attachment to the standards of fidelity and ~~honesty~~ right. But such mere appearance of devotion to the good is surely to be distinguished in our thinking, and our hopes also in real life, - from heartfelt loyalty to honor and virtue, as kinglike attributes which are to be followed at all hazards and through every kind of fortune.-

But the question sometimes presents itself: What practical difference does it make, whether a man is, or is not, deeply and thoroughly honest, so long as he sees ~~so clearly~~ with sufficient clearness — the advantages of appearing to be so, ~~that he~~ and is sure to be honest in deed? This is only part of a larger question ~~for which (to be honest) I have thus meant to pave the way, and which~~ which we may as well proceed at once to consider, What practical difference is made anywhere by the existence of selfish motives, so long as the outward action is such as tends to the benefit of others. The phrase "enlightened selfishness" is one that we often hear, and it appears to be not an uncommon opinion that the growth of human nature and the progress of mankind consist mainly in a certain refinement or education of the selfish instincts; which remain, and must remain forever, (as many people think) the mainspring of human action. At first, it is said, man ignorantly assumes that his own happiness and comfort are in large measure inconsistent with the well-being of others, and that there must be constant warfare between him and them, to determine who shall possess the things that both desire. Gradually he comes to see that his welfare is more or less bound up with the prosperity of others, and that he must seek the gratification of his private ambitions through means that serve the public benefit; But still it is his own private good to which he is chiefly or entirely devoted, and it is his love of self which leads him at last to become the friend of his fellow men. This I understand to be what is meant by the phrase "an enlightened selfishness," and it is not I think an unfair rendering of a kind of philosophy of life very generally received. — Now it is perfectly evident that enlightened selfishness is a ~~very~~ great advance upon ignorant selfishness, so far at least as we take the social point of view. — Whether, in point of individual character the step from one to the other stands for a very important gain, is a more debatable question. But enlightened selfishness gives us social peace; outward agreement and cooperation in certain fundamental relations of life; and, that, though it be only the form of godliness & not the power thereof, ~~that~~ is unquestionably a very great boon.

But does "enlightened selfishness" carry us as far as we may hopefully aspire to go? Is it, even when it appears to be our guide and support, the real basis of a higher civilization? It being granted that certain things must be done for the good of humanity, does it make any practical difference whether they are done through love of others, or only through love of self? — The shrewd politician may assume an honesty that he does not feel;

but if we suspect his virtue to be only an honesty of deed, is it quite the same to us, as if we believed him to be genuinely in love with honorable and upright conduct? There is a kind of patriotism, it would seem, which busies itself with affairs of state, and even fights the nation's battles, moved solely by the expectation of some office or emolument which is to be its reward. But that hardly reaches to the stature of such patriotism as we have been taught to reverence and admire in our own Washington, ~~(a Hampden, or a Garibaldi, or the famous classic models of Greece and Rome~~ or in the ~~to say nothing of~~ illustrious founders and deliverers of other great Nations. – May it not be that all through our ~~business~~ social and commercial life, "enlightened selfishness" is after all only a counterfeit of something vastly more worthy, and that the true light of the world is to be found in an altogether higher source.

Let us see for a moment what are some of the predominant features of this world of human interests with which we have to do;- that we may the better determine whether selfish motives are so much in accord with ~~it~~ the system of things as seems to be commonly supposed; To me it appears that nobody beside has seen this actual human life of ours with so clear an eye as did Jesus of Nazareth, and that, though his professed followers have kept his words in mind as a kind of picture of some far away ideal, the majority of men are still under the spell of a delusion as to the real nature of the world in which they live. Is it not, for example, a kind of general assumption or belief that the method of natural selection now supposed to have governed the advance of animal life, still rules supreme in the affairs of men? In other words is it not generally taken for granted that the man who can do most for himself; who is best armed to meet his fellows in a competitive struggle for wealth and power, irrespective of what he may do to serve the needs of others, is the man who survives, and to whom dominion of this lower world is given? Though Jesus said "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," the popular ~~beatitude~~ beatitude is "Blessed are the proud and strong and self-asserting, for they shall tread ~~upon~~ on others, instead of being trodden upon." – Though the world which Jesus saw, was one in which he who would be chief must become the servant of all, the world as it ~~looks~~ appears to a much shorter and narrower vision is one in which he ~~can~~ who would rise to commanding station, must have others within his power of control, so that he can make them tremble at the threat of his disapproval. Which of these views, then, most truly represents the actual human life of the present day? That ~~each may allege~~ many separate facts may be alleged in support of both ~~many separate facts in its support~~, we must acknowledge. That to a certain extent, and for some limited period men do take and hold positions of high rank, chiefly by ~~the exercise~~ means of violence and intimidation is, perhaps true. — But looking at the world in a large way is any fact more plain than that the great minds which have done most to shape the course of human events, have taken rank according to their ability to do the things which ~~all~~ were for the advantage of their fellow men? ~~men needed, and most men wanted to have done; or perhaps their power to speak the word that was everywhere hidden in the hearts and consciences of their fellows, and which they had not the genius or courage to speak for themselves~~, Since men first began to have an organized Society, no place among them, - won by violent means, *has* ever been securely held; but always the very strength and foundation of a chieftain's influence has been, as Jesus declared it to be, - not his power to wrest from others the satisfaction of his own desires; but his power to do for others that which ministered to their ~~need~~ necessities. So soon as a barbarous tribe rose far enough above the condition of beasts to have a chief or a king, that functionary could only hold the reins of power securely, in proportion as he made himself the servant of the interests of his clan. The moment he turned from these interests, to seek first his own ease and pleasure, that moment, he began to undermine the pillars that upheld his own throne and dynasty. - This is the great and important fact about human life in the past, that every prize worth winning has been won by service of the ~~need~~ wants of others. - Does this look as if the world were wholly and everywhere attuned to a selfish key, or as if selfish motives were the only conceivable source of human action? ~~Does it not rather seem as if the Power that repeatedly makes~~ ~~such~~ ~~demands upon men for conduct whose immediate end is the good of others, and whose only influence upon self is often unwanted,~~ ~~is~~ ~~ought at least to provide the mind with unselfish motives, as the spring of such unselfish action?~~ ~~adequate to meet this necessity?~~ —

Two things may be affirmed of the life of the world, just as it stands to-day, which bear conclusive evidence against the theory that human nature is of necessity entirely and unalterably selfish. Though there is much crowding and jostling, and many a sharp contest for the foremost place along our paths of trade, of industry and politics, you will notice that when any fighter becomes ~~too~~ so aggressive or unscrupulous as to seriously threaten the public welfare he is very quickly put aside, and soon disappears from public sight. The figure that suits the world is like the ~~it is as if the~~ owner of a garden who takes no note, perhaps, of the small depredations of insects and birds, but when a reckless, wandering beast comes trampling down his cultivated fruits and flowers is instantly in arms to drive out the intruder. Humanity tolerates a deal of selfish scrambling in minor places, because there is no cure for it, so long as the passions which inspire it have their home in the hearts of men. But when the fighter becomes too dangerous, then comes into play the law that "he who taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." This means, does it not, that the selfish man, however he may seem to thrive up to a certain point, is not in the end the "fit" man, who "survives" to use the language of our modern science. On the contrary, as might be proved over and over by illustrations drawn from every walk and station in life, he is the unfit man who perishes.

The other feature of our social life which demands far more notice than it generally receives is that, underneath all the rivalries and jealousies that lie upon its surface, the world, in all departments of thought and labor, is one large cooperative establishment, in which all the workers labor for one anothers benefit. I do not say it ought to be this, or will be this in some future millennium; but this is what it now is, spite of all the wars and hatreds and artificial barriers that intervene between man and man. In religion for example, Protestant and Romanist, sometimes grow quite fierce in mutual recrimination and denunciation, But not all the bigotry that has arisen between the two, has prevented the rationalizing Protestant intellect from drinking of those founts of devotion and piety which the Church of Rome has unsealed, nor have the highest walls which a timid papacy could rear suffice to shut out the light of new truth that has come into the world through Protestant minds,— We sing the hymns of Newman in our churches, and the mathematics of Newton are taught in Catholic schools,— In Commerce and Manufactures the same fact of mutual dependence and assistance is everywhere to be seen, as the really fundamental fact of all trade and industry. Of course these relations are more or less interfered with by the various warfares that arise, But the warfare is a disturbance and cooperation is the basis of our whole society. Men who are no more to each other than names; men who are scattered in all quarters of the earth, and who could speak no word in common if they should meet, are daily toiling for one another's benefit. The miller's daughter in New England wears in her hair the bit of silk that was fashioned in far off Asia when civilization first began;— while the miller's flour is being sent to hungry mouths across still another ocean; whose wide gulf of waters is no barrier to those lines of interdependence which the spirit of commerce delights to establish. Is there here any hint that human life is of necessity a selfish contest for existence? Does the form of social system thus disclosed to us show that it needs a soul devoted to wholly selfish ends? Do we find here for ~~[illegible]~~ any justification of the common place that men must be selfish and hard, to get their daily bread? Is it not rather true that men must first of all be able, in some fashion, to help their fellows get their daily bread; and having that ability are they not sure to receive wages according to their helpfulness?

If then the outward features of human life taken as a whole appear to denote ~~the~~ at least the possibility of something better than a spirit wholly intent upon its own pleasure or satisfaction let us ask, "Is human nature, in fact, so entirely influenced by selfish motives as it is often supposed to be?" There is a kind of superficial moral philosophy which says that all action is selfish, since it must needs be that kind of action which best satisfies the nature from which it springs. Thus the philanthropist pleases himself by his gifts to the community, as truly as the miser pleases himself by wringing all that he can out of the necessities of his fellow man. But this specious logic does not touch the heart of the matter. There is a Divine and unselfish gratification which human souls may find in their power to increase some other's happiness and well being; and there is a purer satisfaction with which men may content themselves, in finding their own desires regardless of the fate of those with whom they are associated. That state of mind which cares little or nothing to increase another's joy, and which is outwardly kind and just, only ~~——~~ from motives of policy, because that course reacts favorably upon self, we call selfish; and by unselfishness we mean a genuine, heartfelt desire to confer benefits upon our fellows, irrespective of the reward to be thus won. We have already seen that God has made a world in which he who feels this desire need not fear, — but is working in agreement with the very bone and ~~—~~ framework of ~~—~~ social existence; is it true, then, that the men and women about us, are what the scheming politician so often assumes them to be, mere puppets to be moved and played upon by whoever can pull, deftly enough, the strings of self-interest on which each life is supposed to be hung? Let each man question his own heart. Will he acknowledge to himself that his interest in the occupation with which he busies himself is of a purely selfish kind; that in the practice of his profession he cares only for his wages, and not at all to relieve suffering, or to establish justice between man and man; that in his business enterprises he seeks only dollars, and derives no pleasure from the thought that he is helping to carry forward public improvements, or that he is providing bread to those he gives employment with the means for clothing their families?—

I apprehend that the man who makes professional life this will be as rare a work and as ~~[illegible]~~ hard to find as the man in the story who was to be perfectly contented. And if such an one ~~[illegible]~~ discovers in his own heart, at least some inkling of the higher life capable of yielding the delights of an unselfish joy, why should he not mould the world about him, with some possession of these nobler attributes!

In truth, humanity as we know it contains a strange mixture of the unselfish with the selfish nature, the two are everywhere contending for mastery of the human heart; but even now the more divine principle has a far greater command of the world than we commonly believe. In our home life, so far as people have homes and not mere dens or kennels in which to abide, that principle is already supreme, — and along the crowded thoroughfares of business life, he who looks closely will find it ~~there~~ an ever growing force; — Why should we see ~~only~~ in those ~~combinations~~ organizations of laboring men, that now loom so big above our industrial horizon, only an ignoble combination of vulgar plunder, and ~~be~~ why should we be blind to an element in them which is truly heroic? To considerable extent, they are organizations by means of which the unskilled workman drags the intelligent artisan down in his hand, and informs him of the advantages which justly belong to his superior industry and skill, — Viewed in this light we may safely predict their speedy failure and collapse. But there is another side to ~~them~~ These propositions, from which the skilled workman is seen standing beside his unskilled brother in chivalrous respect for the latter's weakness,' saying to the former that he. You shall not deal with this common bond, as if it were a question of me and mine, selfish feeling, ambition or something;' — and so far as this latter-day chivalry takes its indiscriminate course, it may be seen that here is a subtle danger and more enduring than any bribe which such 'schemes' can offer, — We know that when the occasion calls for it, a spirit of unselfish devotion to some cause like that of union or freedom may kindle and spread in the public mind, like fire

I have been told, that doctrines such as this leads straight on to another French Revolution; and if I wanted evidence that many members of our so-called "privileged classes" grossly deceive themselves, such an accusation coming from such a source, would abundantly supply it. The French Revolution indeed! As if that awful ~~[illegible]~~ tempest of passion which arose because a heartless nobility forgot all its duties toward humanity, till out of the heart of the common people burst a storm of hatred and resentment, which almost wrecked the life of a nation, — as if that fearful whirlwind of fire and blood had its origin in ~~any~~

anything but the very rankest selfishness which human nature can show. Now and forever the one most effectual preventive of revolutions is for those who are at the top of society to show that they are not unmindful of the ties which ~~that~~ bind them to their kind; that their life consists not in the abundance of the things they possess, and that they think of themselves, in the positions which they occupy, chiefly as stewards of a trust which God and the world have reposed in them. It is a fatal blindness when they who ~~which~~ wish to content themselves with a selfish use of life's opportunities, hug to their souls the delusion that Christ's doctrine leads to the upheaval or dissolution of established order.

in the forest, – and though at other times this great force seems to have died down into ashes, – yet the capacity for its reawakening always exists, and as time goes on it will more and more come forth from its hiding place to take a steady and continuous part in life's daily occupations.

But Alas! we do not, any of us, believe as we ought, in the Divine Humanity; the spirit that comes down from heaven to take possession of human hearts, widely different from the inheritance they have received by physical descent from a savage or an animal ancestry. The old symbol of a God-man in Christ, ceases to be received as evidence of one, only, special and miraculous union of the human and divine, while men have not yet grown, as they will, to behold in that symbol the witness of a Holy Spirit, everywhere pouring ~~out~~ itself into human hearts, and incorporating itself with human nature, to make this earthly life, heavenly and sublime ~~divine~~. — Still we act too much under the old delusion, that our life consists in the abundance of things we can heap up about us, and that the covetous spirit, if only it ~~may be~~ is successful in getting what it covets, is ~~the~~ most blessed and happy. Against the plainest evidence, that love and truth and goodness are the only real sources of contentment, and that no joys of possession can begin to equal the godlike delight of imparting new life and blessing, men follow their selfish instincts as if ~~they~~ these were heavenly guides. They hear ~~these~~ the old truth~~s~~ stated as in a dream, and go their way in pursuit of vanities, till at last their starved hearts refuse any longer to be cheated, and with a large part of life's opportunities wasted, they are perhaps willing to seek the bread that cometh down from heaven. – What wonder that people are fearful and doubtful on many points of doctrine, while they are ignorant of this first visible certainty, that here is a truly Christlike and divine spirit slowly coming into power among men, which spirit is the real life of human souls,'

The practical ~~failing~~ failure and fallacy of what is called "enlightened selfishness" is that however people may see their own reward in doing good to others, they have not entered upon the ~~true~~ highest way of life, till it becomes their joy to do good for its own sake, Set up your external social millennium, with its perfect system of coöperation; carry forward the enlightenment of the head, till each one learns that he must serve in order to command, or even to feed at Society's table! - Still what you have is little better than a whited sepulcher, till you can put into this base shell of a better world, the soul of a new manhood and womanhood, capable of delight in heavenly law and heavenly love. -

The first man, who is of the earth, earthy, is selfish, covetous, and goes up and down the world seeking only what he can get out of it; The Second Man," the Lord from heaven, is loving and generous, and whatever he adds to the store which he may call his own, it is always for the purpose of increasing his power and influence as an agent of the divine truth and goodness here upon the earth; It is no mere surmise, but a most blessed certainty that this spiritual humanity increases and prevails, Its spirit is the real life of our souls; to-day - the only life that is worthy an immortal career, - the only life that is truly worth living here among men, Great reason have we to praise the Father of our souls, that he has shown us through Christ, and many another pure heart, the beauties of this heavenly life, and has opened ~~to~~ before our spirits a door to his own eternal realm, which if we will enter it, no man can shut against us,